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A poor summer

Statement by the FdCA

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

8 July 2008

Summer is here and the conditions of all those of us who depend on wages and pensions are getting rapidly worse. All thanks to mortgages, to the services of a welfare state that costs more and more, to death that awaits us in the workplace, to the shortage of dignified work that can assure our future.

The purchasing power of our wages is collapsing (-20% according to OECD), pensions conceded by the government allow no dignity to old age, despite the odd arrogant handout.

Low wages provoke a general fall in consumption. We just cannot cope with inflation, with the price of oil and food or with our mortgage instalments.

But what matters if the workers are poorer and poorer? The banks are always ready to help us: get yourself a loan. But sooner or later we have to pay it back, maybe with the help of another loan, and so on. Capitalism grabs you by the throat. It wants to take back every cent (with interest) of your pay cheque that has today become a sort of subsistence benefit, that makes up only 4-5% of every €100 of the value of the goods we produce. And we do still produce.

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The question of wages is being removed from the point of production and the workplace: wage insufficiency is being presented as a sort of pathological plague, the cure to which will mostly be based on contributions from the patient, in other words the worker.

A stream of unreliable, unqualified doctors arrive at our bedside. The first to our aid is the government bringing tax adjustments (cancellation of the local authority house tax, de-taxing of overtime, etc.) which we have to pay for with our taxes and at the price of wage increases; next up is the sympathetic attention of the governor of the Bank of Italy (who suggests we buy cheap government bonds!); the employers' federation, Confindustria, is worried about us (and wants to give us money — not its money, of course — tax money); lastly, we receive the attention of the unions in their desperation, who hope to rake up a little more available money for us through reform of labour contracts, in exchange for productivity (greater exploitation) at a decentralized level and in the meantime put their hopes in the tax man.

But all this cannot halt the plummeting purchasing power of wages. The cures that have been announced have no hope of working. Because they have been tried before, and they avoid the problem of constant impoverishment faced with price and tariff rises.

And not only that; the conviction still remains that an (inexorable) increase in wages will provoke inflation, so the government sets the planned ceiling at 1.7% and the Central European Bank promptly raises the lending rate by 0.25%, indifferent to whether or not Europe's economy is booming or slumping.

The social question of wages must be brought back into the workplace and the points of production (local, national, European); it must be brought back into the places where public services are provided at affordable rates; it must be brought back into decent policies for social welfare.

True reform of bargaining lies in relaunching a wide-scale battle for wages that aims for consistent increases all over, starting from the European minimum wage, that can reduce the impact of payroll extras (bonuses, incentives, etc.) and the tendency towards individual contracts, that can re-establish a mechanism that automatically takes account of inflation, that can return rights and bargaining power to the workers' grassroots bodies in the workplace.

Faced with the government's urgent decrees, the workers must provide their own urgent response. We must regain our faith in ourselves and our organizational abilities. In the CGIL, there is the worker-called assembly in Rome on 23 July; in the grassroots unions, there are new initiatives for cooperation. All this can help us to regain our autonomy and our ability to mobilize around concrete objectives, around immediate interests, and without politicking shortcuts.

Rarely have we seen capitalism attack the working class with such a well-aimed and all-embracing crisis, both in Italy and throughout the world, acting on inflation together with the prices of raw materials and agricultural products in a climate of war and terror, of racism and State repression.

The Right won the elections. But let us not allow panic, resignation and atomization to hand them over not only our votes but also our consciousness as exploited.

The cure for our ills is the same as ever: it depends on our ability to organize and remain autonomous, so that we can emancipate ourselves from capitalism and the State, so that we can build a self-managed, solid society.

Making foundations, building, advancing, organizing, giving the best of ourselves.